



NEWS FROM

Congressman

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OPENING REMARKS – CHAIRMAN STEVE BUYER

MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON MILITARY TRAINING

AND GENDER-RELATED ISSUES

Until November 1996, when the Army revealed the shocking sexual misconduct by its drill instructors and cadre with recruits in basic and advanced individual training at Aberdeen Proving Ground and other bases, few people had reason to question the process by which the military services transformed its citizens into soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines.

The House Armed Services Committee was among the first in Congress to attempt to understand why Aberdeen occurred, and to define potential corrective actions. In November 1996, the committee began a bipartisan, systematic, thorough investigation of not only the Army's recruit training system, but also those of the other services.

As with many things in life, sometimes when you go looking for one thing, you end up, to your surprise, finding another. What we on the committee found when we went looking for the causes and cures of sexual misconduct by drill instructors was an enormously complex set of issues that did not lend themselves to any magic, silver bullet solution. The surprise that we also found was the widespread assertions by the officers and NCO's in the services conducting gender-integrated basic training, by the trainees themselves, and by the leaders of operational units who were receiving the graduates of gender-integrated basic training that:

- 1) Basic training had lost its rigor; and that,
- 2) Basic training was failing to transform civilians into disciplined, physically fit, skilled soldiers, sailors and airmen who were prepared for the demands and challenges of duty in operational units.

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The import of these assertions led the committee, and eventually the Congress, to charter an independent commission – the Commission on Military Training and Gender Related Issues — to examine:

- Whether the services' basic training programs produce graduates who are adequately trained to ensure that they report to operational units with an appropriate level of skills, physical conditioning and military socialization to meet unit requirements and operational readiness?
- And whether, given the demographics, education and background of new recruits, gender integrated basic training was the most efficient and effective method to produce graduates who meet service needs?

Today we will hear the report of the of the Congressional Commission on Military Training and Gender Related Issues on these two questions, as well as other issues.

Ironically, exactly one year ago today, this subcommittee received the report and testimony of the Kassebaum-Baker Panel which had been appointed by the Secretary of Defense to examine and make recommendations for improving the gender-integrated basic and advanced individual training systems of the Armed Services. The Kassebaum-Baker Panel made 30 recommendations, most of which the services readily adopted.

The most controversial reform recommended by Kassebaum-Baker was that the Army, Navy and Air Force should respectively organize gender-separate platoons, divisions and flights, but continue to conduct gender-integrated training by bringing these smaller units together as larger units for gender-integrated training during most of basic. This reform – essentially the system used by the Air Force for more than twenty years (from the mid-1970's until mid-1997) to successfully implement gender-integration — was steadfastly rejected by the services.

I suspect we will here more about this issue and others today from our witnesses, and I look forward to their testimony.

Ms. Blair, I understand you will open the testimony, to be followed by Mr. Pang, to present an overview of the commission's report. Following that overview, each commissioner, in alphabetical order, will have an opportunity to present additional views.

To all the commissioners, I want to acknowledge beforehand your commitment and dedication to the task set out for you by Congress. The volatility, range and numbers of issues we asked you to investigate were enormous. The rigorous standard of investigation and research we demanded of you was unprecedented in my experience in dealing with Congressional commissions. And the time that we allowed you to complete the missions we gave you was exceedingly compressed. I know that none of this has been easy for you, or your staff. Given all this, I want to thank each of you publicly for the efforts you have made in this especially difficult task set for you by the Congress.

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